

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

a SD11
U523

SEL/RES 175

R10-10



Reserved

INOCUPEMENT...
Alphabetical Serial File

ALASKA

a new experience in
Working & Living

ALASKA: A NEW EXPERIENCE IN
WORKING AND LIVING, by Dorothy Mun-
son, Sammy Shaffer, and Joseph Mancuso.
Region 10, Forest Service, U.S. Department of
Agriculture, P.O. Box 1628, Juneau, AK
99802. January 1978, Series No. R10-8.

PREFACE

This publication was mainly designed for the
U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service
employees who are moving to duty stations in
Alaska. Its purpose is to provide a brief descrip-
tion of the region and the Alaska lifestyle so that
newcomers may have more accurate expecta-
tions of the problems as well as delights of
moving "North To The Future!"

ALASKA:

A NEW EXPERIENCE IN WORKING AND LIVING

WORKING AND LIVING IN THE ALASKA REGION can be a unique and rewarding experience for newcomers. The degree of fulfillment and enjoyment of these experiences depends on attitudes. Some newcomers find adjustments to their new homes difficult at times. Others thrive, finding adjustments merely trivial.

Any transition in working and living environments calls for some form of orientation. So, we want to let people know what to expect and to acquaint them with their new jobs and neighborhoods.

THE LAND

Whether coming by land, sea, or air, people are first impressed by the magnificent scenery along the way. They also sense the vastness of the land and become aware of its natural attributes. Within this great territory are the two largest national forests in the Nation: The Chugach in south-central Alaska and, about 600 miles away, the Tongass in southeast Alaska.

The Alaska Region is characterized by dense tree stands of western hemlock and Sitka spruce. In many places, narrow waterways divide steep forested slopes of rugged high mountains. Glaciers creep through valleys, forming lakes and streams and supporting many kinds of wildlife.

South-Central Alaska. — The Chugach National Forest includes the Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula areas of the south-central Pacific rim of Alaska. Deep harbors and broad valleys of the area serve as transportation corridors to interior Alaska.

Much of the State's farmland lies in this area's rich valleys: Matanuska, at the head of Cook Inlet, is the most famous. The Kenai Peninsula is a major recreational playground for the region. The south-central area is also rich in Alaska history, for it was on the Chugach National Forest in Prince William Sound off Kayak Island that Vitus Bering in 1741 first sighted "The Great Land."

Southeast Alaska. — The Tongass National Forest lies within the boundaries of the Alexander Archipelago, better known as the Alaska "Panhandle," and is considered by many to be the most beautiful part of the State. It is a region of scenic mountains, cut by the majestic fiords of the "Inside Passage," where blue-white glaciers inch slowly to the water's edge. It is an area of coastal towns, dense rain forests, and thousands of wooded islands.

Alaska's history is evident throughout the southeast. Totems of the Tlingit-Haida Indian heritage are found in nearly every community.

Onion-domed Orthodox churches in Juneau and Sitka stand as reminders of days when the Czars of Imperial Russia ruled the lands. Remnants of visitors from France and Spain are found in place names of islands towns, bays, coves, and moun-

tains. Deserted camps and mine sites tell the fading story of the "sourdough" era when gold seekers struggled north in search of fame and fortune.

WORKING IN ALASKA

The Forest Service in Region 10 is unique, compared with other regions. Forest Supervisors oversee operations on the two national forests by using a system of work centers. There is one Forest Supervisor for the Chugach National Forest. On the Tongass National Forest, three administrative areas have been established — Chatham (Sitka), Ketchikan, and Stikine (Petersburg) — each with its own Forest Supervisor.

Chugach National Forest. — With its headquarters in Anchorage, this forest is near the largest urban area in the State. Although the State's population totals nearly 400,000, the 528,100 visitor-days of use in 1976 reflect the forest's response to the recreational needs of a burgeoning Anchorage-area population. Mt. Alyeska, an internationally known ski area, is a Forest Service facility, although the lodge concessions are on private land. Fishing, hunting, drive-in and dispersed camping, and other recreational opportunities are plentiful. Wildlife programs, such as those on the Copper River

Delta, include intensive management studies and habitat enhancement efforts. (Forest Service duty stations are at Anchorage, Cordova, Kodiak, and Seward.)

Tongass National Forest. — This is the largest national forest in the Nation — bigger than several States combined! Recreational opportunities include camping, fishing, hiking, hunting, skiing, and many others. One of the forest's greatest attractions is the chance to explore parts of the millions of acres of wilderness where few, if any, signs of human activities exist.

Timber harvesting is relatively new in Alaska and is centered mainly in the southeast. Its greatest expansion came during the fifties when the Federal Government encouraged the development of a year-round permanent industry. (Forest Service duty stations are at Craig, Juneau, Kake, Ketchikan, Petersburg, Sitka, Wrangell, and Yakutat.)

LIVING IN ALASKA

It is customary, when describing Alaska, to use a long parade of superlatives: "Biggest," "tallest," "friendliest," and so forth. Add one more — Alaska is also among the highest in the cost of living — one of the top three in the Nation. Of course, the 25-percent cost-of-living allowance, in addition to basic salary, helps buffer living costs for Federal workers.

Housing and utilities. — These are difficult to discuss, because area availability and individual needs vary. Adequate rental units, especially apartments and townhouses, are scarce and expensive in most locations. Most

areas have mobile home parks, but check the special State requirements for insulation if you move a mobile home to Alaska. Houses for sale generally are available but expensive.

Appliances are as prevalent in most Alaska housing units as in other parts of the United States, although servicing proves difficult for all but major brands. Be certain that washers, dryers, and other items are repaired before moving. Gas-based appliances are uncommon, and you may have to convert them to electricity. In many areas, cable television is available. Special programs are broadcast live by satellite. Party-line telephones are still used in most

places, but service is improving. Electric power, generally based on hydroelectric generators, is comparable or perhaps lower in cost than in many other parts of the Nation.

Houses and apartments are often heated by hot water systems that use fuel oil. Cool temperatures during summer nights make heating a year-round need. This makes the cost of heating a major consideration in selecting housing. Some apartments and houses have fireplaces, and wood is generally low in cost and plentiful.

Land and construction material prices are high, too; any housebuilding should be well planned. At-home entertaining is typically Alaskan. So, even though housing is expensive, having some amenities may be worth their price.

Climate. — Alaska has four time zones and at least as many variations in climate. Of the 50 States, Alaska is the northernmost, westernmost, and easternmost (part of it extends into the Eastern Hemisphere). This vastness accounts for the many climates. The two national forests are on the Pacific rim, and their climates are affected by the warm air generated by the Japan Current.

The Chugach National Forest and nearby areas vary widely in precipitation and temperature. On the one hand, Anchorage has an annual precipitation of about 13 inches (33 cm), a mean winter low temperature of about 7°F (-14°C), and a mean summer high of about 57°F (14°C). In general, it is a cool, dry, sunny city. On the other hand, Cordova has a coastal rain-forest climate with an annual precipitation of 167 inches (424 cm), a mean winter low of about 26°F (-3°C), and a mean summer high of about 55°F (13°C).

Southeastern Alaska weather makes for more cloudy days than sunny ones. Annual precipitation ranges from 154 inches (391 cm) at Ketchikan to about 55 inches (140 cm) at Juneau. Much of this falls as a light, misty rain during most of the year with great snowfalls at high elevations in winter. With so much water, forests have become dense, fern-laden, and generally free of fire. And, just above the trees, strips of misty clouds hug the mountainsides. Temperatures change gradually and are only slightly lower than in Seattle. Mean winter lows are about 35°F (2°C) at Ketchikan and 25°F (-4°C) at Juneau; mean summer highs reach about 58°F (14°C) at Ketchikan and 55°F (13°C) at Juneau.

It's true, too, if you've heard the rumors. In the Alaska Region, you can read a newspaper outdoors on a clear summer midnight. Here's the catch: In winter, daylight is reduced to about 4 to 6 hours!

Transportation. — Travel within Alaska is diversified. Access to south-central Alaska is either by air, land, or water. The Alaska-Canada (ALCAN) Highway connects the State with the "Lower 48." From Seattle, the Alaska Marine Highway System's ferries travel through the "Inside Passage" of the southeast to Haines and Skagway. Then, south-central Alaska can be reached by using a connecting road to the ALCAN Highway. In addition to roads, Anchorage and Fairbanks are connected by the Alaska Railroad which has automobile carriers.

Before bringing an automobile to Alaska, have it tuned, serviced, and repaired, if needed. Purchase snowtires and rims — generally these items cost more in Alaska than in other States. Despite rich oilfields in the North, gasoline is high in price in Alaska, because the oil generally is shipped elsewhere for refining.

Once employed in Alaska, a person is considered a resident and must immediately transfer automobile registration to Alaska. Insurance premiums are very high, perhaps because of expensive repairs, and some companies are not represented in the State.

If you drive through Canada, check with your company for a special insurance card to certify coverage. When moving, remember that all weapons must be declared at the Canadian border where they will be sealed; they may be opened after leaving Canada. Canadian border officials often ask for proof of financial responsibility for your period of travel through Canada. They evaluate credit cards, travellers checks, and cash. If you plan to bring houseplants, have them inspected and certified disease-free by a U.S. Department of Agriculture agent.

When servicing a car in Canada, note the use of imperial quarts and gallons — they're 20 percent larger than American units. Adding too much oil can damage an engine. So, remember that oil capacities of U.S.-built engines are designed for American units and not for the full measure of imperial quarts.

If travel is planned on the Alaska Marine Highway System, check in early, even if you have tickets. Most ferries are fully booked, especially

in summer. Food and beverage services are provided, but you may want to bring extras for “after hours” when the services close. And, although no games are provided on board to entertain children during evenings, Forest Service Naturalists provide onboard summertime lectures, films, publications, and suggestions for sighting mountains, rivers, and even whales. Pets are not allowed in passenger areas and must be kept in vehicles.

Education. — All Forest Service stations are in communities with adequate schooling facilities for grades 1 through 12. Preschools are available in most areas. The University of Alaska at Fairbanks has community college facilities in Anchorage, Juneau, Ketchikan, Kodiak, and Sitka. Senior college staff members regularly travel to such smaller cities as Petersburg and Wrangell.

Shopping. — Most food in Alaska is brought from the “Lower 48” by refrigerated vans on barges, on the ferry system, or by truck on the ALCAN Highway. This includes meat, produce, some dairy products, and so forth. Perishables generally are shipped by air. Every community has some type of grocery outlet. They range from supermarkets to small family operations.

Since most food items are shipped to Alaska, high-quality items are selected by the buyers so food will be less perishable during transit. Prices certainly are higher than the national average, but they are comparable to prices in large cities.

Clothing prices are high, too, but not extremely so. Brand names and good quality generally are available. Many families use mail-order catalogs for routine purchases. Before moving, you may want to buy foul-weather gear, such as kneeboots and raincoats. Umbrellas rarely are used because of winter winds and local customs. Jackets and sweaters are worn at times throughout the year — there is little need for hot weather clothing.

Medical and Dental Services. — In southeast, most areas have doctors and at least small hospitals, except for Craig and Kake which have public health nurses. Yakutat is serviced by a small clinic and a paramedic. Anchorage has several hospitals, doctors, and specialists. Cordova, Kodiak, and Seward also have doctors and small hospitals.

Dental care in Alaska is high in cost and limited in service areas. Few, if any, dental surgeons are available, except in Anchorage. Minimal orthodontic services are provided in Juneau, Ketchikan, and Sitka. Small towns have no dental services, except for visiting dentists.

Ophthalmic care and other optical services are as expensive and limited as dental services. If possible before moving, obtain up-to-date checkups for all needs. Federal health benefits are still available, of course, but you may want to change your carrier or plan option during the next “open season.”

Recreational Opportunities. — Ski slopes vary in condition and degree of difficulty, depending on locale. Alyeska, 40 miles from Anchorage, and Eaglecrest, 6 miles from Juneau, are comparable to ski slopes in the “Lower 48.” Other Forest Service stations have nearby local runs. Cross-country skiing is excellent in all areas, as well as sledding, tobogganing, and at times ice skating.

Boating, canoeing, and fishing are popular activities. The largest salmon in the world have been caught in Alaska waters! And Alaska’s trout, halibut, and other fish are big, too. Hunting, in season, is permitted near most stations. (Licenses are required for these activities.)

Backpacking, hiking, and beachcamping are common warm-weather pastimes. Most areas have nearby trails. Be certain to check with local authorities for recommended protective measures. Exposure, hidden mine shafts, and such wild animals as bears can upset any hike. Check on plant varieties, too; many persons enjoy picking berries and mushrooms. Also, the Forest Service maintains primitive cabins in remote areas for public use at nominal fees.

Summertime gives home gardeners long hours of daylight. Very little topsoil is available, because most areas have well-drained glacial till or sandy soils.

Several towns have indoor athletic facilities, including swimming pools. A few have tennis courts and bowling lanes. Singing and square/folk dancing groups meet in many communities.

Cultural opportunities are limited in Alaska, except in the Anchorage area. Many persons enjoy collecting Native art sold by Tlingit and Haida

Indians in the southeast and by Eskimo and other Native groups in south-central Alaska. Most communities have amateur theater groups and volunteer activities.

During winter, prepare yourself and the family, if you have one, for spending long hours indoors.

In summer, of course, daylight hours are much longer!

Religious Organizations. — Churches and temples of most prevalent beliefs serve nearly all areas. Many provide civic and social services.

WELCOME

In general, newcomers to Alaska are impressed with the relaxed atmosphere, casual dress, and friendly people — as well as the spectacular scenery. We enjoy working and living in Alaska. We hope you will, too!

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE
ALASKA REGION

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300

POSTAGE AND FEES PAID
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGR 101

